

Henry Waxman to retire from US Congress

Jewish lawmaker, who maintains close ties to Israel, has represented Los Angeles district for 40 years

BY GAVRIEL FISKE AND JTA | January 30, 2014, 9:12 pm |

Representative Henry Waxman, the dean of Jewish lawmakers in the US House of Representatives, is retiring, his office announced Thursday. Waxman, Democrat of California, 74, who was first elected to Congress from a west Los Angeles district in 1974, will finish out his current term, which ends on January 2, 2015.

The longest serving Jewish House member, Waxman took a lead on pro-Israel issues, most recently in joining with Energy Committee Chairman Fred Upton, Republican of Michigan, to advance a bill that would increase cooperation with Israel in energy research.

Waxman said in a statement that he has “worked throughout my career to strengthen the US-Israel relationship. I have traveled to Israel on numerous occasions and will never forget the times Janet and I were there to greet President Sadat of Egypt and to see the arrival of the airlift carrying Ethiopian refugees.

“I fought for the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate and took great satisfaction in seeing Refusenicks that I had met in the former Soviet Union achieve their dream of living in the Jewish state of Israel,” he added. “I authored the Middle East Regional Cooperation Program for scientific exchanges between the US, Israel, and the Arab countries. And it is with pride that I have seen my daughter thrive in Israel and my grandchildren serve in the Israeli army.”

“I am grateful for my supporters and allies, who have worked side-by-side with me to fight for issues we care about: health, environmental protection, women’s and gay rights, and strengthening the ties between the United States and our most important ally, the State of Israel,” he said in a statement Thursday.

Waxman has risen to leadership positions in the House, most recently as the senior Democrat on the powerful Energy Committee, which he chaired from 2009 to 2011. Waxman was perhaps most prominent as the chairman of the Oversight Committee during the last two years of the George W. Bush administration, convening hearings about the conduct of the Iraq War.

To serve in Congress for so long was “an extraordinary experience” and “an honor,” Waxman said, adding that the four decades felt “like a blink of an eye.”

“I still feel youthful and energetic, but I recognize if I want to experience a life outside of Congress, I need to start soon,” he said. “Public office is not the only way to serve, and I want to explore other avenues while I still can.”

Waxman said that he abhorred the Tea Party Republicans, and was “embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts, and ignoring facts,” but stressed that he was not leaving out of frustration with partisan politics.

The National Jewish Democratic council praised Waxman’s accomplishments Thursday, and said that the congressman, the “Dead of the Jewish Delegation,” was “a champion of Jewish causes – the Clean Air Act, climate change, food and drug safety, affordable health care, the plight of Holocaust survivors and the US-Israel relationship.”

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